

## Feedback on the Advanced School on Axonal Transport and Neurodegenerative Disease

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This brief note provides feedback on the Advanced School on Axonal Transport and Neurodegenerative Disease, held between IITB, Mumbai (January 13-19) and Club Mahabaleshwar, Mahabaleshwar (January 20-26). I was a speaker at both venues: my first lecture was an introductory one, intended to provide some biophysical background to this problem, while the second was a research-level talk. My experience of this meeting was extremely positive from every point of view: the students were intelligent, hard-working and engaged, the other lecturers were both exceptionally competent and approachable and the organization was exemplary.

The number of faculty and students working on motor transport-related problems in India is increasing steadily. The public-health impacts of neurodegenerative diseases associated with defective axonal transport, such as Alzheimer's disease, are considerable, especially as populations around the world become older. Across Indian institutions, several young faculty members are forming groups in this area, looking for bright students, post-docs and a pool of interested collaborators, while older groups are consolidating. Training current students and future investigators for frontier research in this field is thus especially valuable. The speakers at both Mumbai and Mahabaleshwar came from several prominent institutions in the USA, Netherlands, Switzerland and India. The choice of the speakers was careful and balanced: all were good teachers, not just in terms of their breadth of knowledge or at the level of preparing and presenting pedagogical lectures but also specifically in terms of keeping themselves available and willing to engage at all times. This is hard to gauge in advance, so credit must be given to those who chose the speakers. This worked both ways: every lecturer commented very positively on the attitude, interest, raw capabilities and knowledge of the students, with several saying that this was the best set of students they had ever encountered, both in terms of preparation and training as well as in motivation for research.

I have nothing negative to say about any part of the school. I would not have organized it any differently. I do have two comments, which may be useful to ICTS-sponsored schools in the future: First, some continuity would be good. To make a significant scientific impact, we must make sure not just that Indian students are exposed to the best in the world, but have the opportunity to sustain their interest. Exposing them to an environment where they can be challenged by world experts in their area, not combatively but in a positive, collegial way, is especially important. Given constraints on the current size of the Indian community in this area, we might not be able to do this on a day-to-day basis, but funding a regular meeting once a year, would fill a significant gap.

My second comment is that it might be good to expand the student body a bit, specifically by including students from other countries, maybe by up to as 10-20% of the student body. This is because the process by which Indian students benchmark themselves and their achievements would be enriched if they were able to interact with students from other countries while still doing their PhD's. Understanding different methods of working, 'cultures' of research as well as being comfortable in an international environment are all intangible yet important. Including students from countries such as China, Japan, Korea as well as other countries of east and south Asia would, in the long-term, carry significant benefits, since the balance of scientific funding and manpower appears to be shifting decisively towards these countries and away from the west. It would be good for students and faculty in India to think along these lines and perhaps there is some wisdom in taking the long view here.